

KAZAKH HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE CONTEXT OF COMPETITION FROM CHINESE AND RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES

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This study conceptualizes and analyses impact of internationalization strategies of Chinese and Russian Universities on resilience of Kazakh Universities using Hirschman's Exit-Voice-Loyalty framework.

Higher education system in Kazakhstan dramatically expanded and underwent crucial changes with transition. The Soviet higher education with the state order, free of charge admissions and resources allocated and controlled by the centre has evolved towards openness, liberalisation and optimization with increased competition and search of more sustainable financial model. The number of higher educational institutions increased dramatically – from 61 in 1991 to 125 in 2017; accordingly increased the number of students - from 288.4 in 1991 to 477.1 thousand people in 2017. Economic theory generally suggests that growing competition allows achieve market efficiency, better resource allocation, and increase consumer surplus. On the other hand, in higher education, “an industry in which consumers are often underinformed in the sense that they cannot objectively evaluate the quality of the services before they actually purchase it” (Brewer, et al, 2001, p.19), increased competition against the background of economic turmoil, lack of recourses and embryonic labour market led to even greater unsustainability and widely perceived decline in quality.

This study argues that recent increase in recruitment of Kazakh students by Chinese (50700 students as of number in 2017) and Russian Universities (13900 students as of 2017) shows that young generation is choosing exit option out of Kazakh higher education system to guarantee their post-University employment opportunities. In the absence of improving Voice option, this trend will erode resilience of Kazakh Universities and can lead to crisis in Kazakhstan higher education system.

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used: Theoretical framework borrows from Albert Hirschmann's Exit-Voice-Loyalty framework. Empirical data of the paper consists of national and international higher education statistics and polls conducted in 50 schools which were attended by 1400 high school students. Methodological aspects will rely on different quantitative and qualitative tools (regressions, binary dependent variable models, or ordinary least square).

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings: We test if the choice made by Kazakh students in favour of Russian and Chinese universities might be interpreted as their optimising behaviour based on some anticipated benefits; does it depend on students'

characteristics and preferences (such as language of instruction, English proficiency, future field of study, family income, region of residence) and universities' promotional campaigns; what factors determines students' decisions: tuition fee, university reputation, rankings and recognition, facilities, international employment opportunities; and what are the economic and social consequences of student outflow on Kazakh universities. Thereupon this paper proposes several strategies to achieve balance between Exit-Voice option in Kazakhstan higher education.